



ZEPPELIN MAIL

After WWI, the entire world was fascinated by those “magnificent men in their flying machines”, and the largest machines made were the majestic Zeppelins.

Named after Count Zeppelin, a German cavalry officer, Germany was foremost in the development and execution of this graceful, even luxurious way to travel.



Prior to WWI, the Zeppelin (or dirigible) was developed by Germany, Great Britain, France, and Italy as a military platform, and used marginally in WWI by Germany and Great Britain for naval reconnaissance, and bombing. After WWI, only Germany developed the Zeppelin as a commercial long distance “airship” to carry passengers and importantly for us, mail. While any valid stamp could be used on Zeppelin mail, many countries, to include the U.S. and Germany had special Zeppelin issues, shown above.



The most successful of the many zeppelins was LZ 127, the “Graf Zeppelin”, launched in 1928. Named after Ferdinand von Zeppelin, who was a count or “Graf”, in nine years she made 950 flights covering 1,056,000 miles, that included 144 ocean crossings, and carried 13,110 passengers. She was aloft for a total of 17,177 hours (the equivalent of 717 days, nearly two years) without ever injuring a passenger or crew member. She usually carried about 52,000 postcards and 50,000 letters. Her first trip to the United States was in October, 1928, and the cover above is from the Graf's return flight to Germany.



One of her most famous flights was to go completely around the world, from Lakehurst, NJ, flying east all the way around the world and arriving back in Lakehurst, NJ! The top cover was aboard for the entire journey. The lower cover was on the leg from Toyo to Los Angeles!





The zeppelin best remembered by history is the LZ 129, the "Hindenburg", named after the late president of Germany. These two covers are from her first visit to America: the one above from her westward voyage to Lakehurst, NJ; the one below the return to Germany. The Hindenburg exploded during landing at Lakehurst the next year, 1937.





The United States, like Great Britain, copied the last military zeppelins used by Germany in WWI, and built the first U.S. dirigible (ZR-1) in August, 1923. Regrettably, the ZR-1, known as the USS Shenandoah, a naval airship, operated only two years. She was lost in a storm over Ohio in September, 1925. The cover above was carried by the Shenandoah eight weeks prior to her loss.



The United States re-entered the Zeppelin business by having Germany build us a Zeppelin. Known as the ZR 3 (LZ 126) Germany built and delivered her to the United States as a "war Reparation", that is in repayment for losing WWI. Once in America, she became the USS Los Angeles, a U.S. Navy airship. The cover above is from the delivery flight from Germany to Lakehurst, NJ, and is signed by the ZR 3's Captain, Hugo Eckener. The Los Angeles operated successfully until retired in 1932.

The U.S. built three more airships with German assistance, but all three ended in disasters.



The U.S. resumed building its own dirigibles, using Germany as a consultant. The next airship, LRS 4 was built in Akron Ohio, and christened as the USS Akron. The cover above is from that christening. The cover below is with the Akron on fleet operations with the U.S. Navy. The Akron was lost in a storm 4 April 1933 with the loss of 73 lives.





The U.S.'s last effort at building dirigibles was the ZRS 5, built in Akron and launched in April 1933. Both of these covers are in concert with fleet visits on the west coast. The lower one is on operation with the battleship Pennsylvania, sister ship to the Arizona, both attacked at Pearl Harbor. The Macon was lost in a storm in February, 1935

